

Essential Guide to Walking and Steps

by [MyFitnessPal](#)



Walking is one of the most rewarding lifelong activities you can choose. While it may not be a huge calorie burner — the average person burns about 100 calories or so per mile — adding more mileage to your day can make a [big difference](#) in weight control. According to Harvard Health Watch, one 2009 study found the average person gains about 2.2 pounds a year during middle age. However, over 15 years of research, the study found that individuals who walked regularly gained significantly less weight than those who didn't.

Walking also offers plenty of health benefits, including [lowering the risk](#) of high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes; reducing the risk of developing dementia and cancer and even reducing fibromyalgia pain. Plus, walking may be even more beneficial than running. Walkers have a much lower risk of exercise-related injuries than runners, whose legs absorb about [100 tons of impact force](#) in just one mile. So, if you're just starting your fitness journey, know that fitness walking is a seriously good place to begin.

WHAT TO WEAR ON YOUR WALKS

Whatever makes you feel comfortable is the easy answer. There is no need for fancy spandex or workout clothes, unless that's what you like. As you start moving farther and faster, you may want to get [dedicated fitness walking clothes](#) that wick away sweat or allow you to layer for different weather conditions, but for a beginning fitness walker, comfort trumps everything else.

The one must-have is a [fitness shoe](#) — no exceptions. A [walking, running](#) or (some) cross-trainers are the right choice for walking workouts that get big health and weight-

loss results. Don't skimp on shoes. You need the shock absorption to protect your joints and the support to walk stronger and longer.

THE KEY TO MAKING THE MOST OF WALKING

What makes a fitness walk a fitness walk? It's not the [foot strike](#). It's not the arm swing. It's the "bellybutton-to-spine" action — sometimes called a "tummy tuck" — that will make your walk more effective, protect your back and get your abs in on the action.

As you walk, draw your bellybutton toward your spine. That deep layer of muscle is key to supporting your back. It stabilizes the middle of your body so your legs can move with much more power. It also engages your core, which in turn helps engage other muscle groups as you walk.

6 EASY STEPS TO FITNESS WALKING

Once properly outfitted with shoes and a comfortable outfit, here's the plan:

1. Head outside.
2. Look at the time and remember it.
3. Walk at your normal pace for 10 minutes.
4. Turn around to head back to where you started.
5. Your body is now warm and ready for an increased challenge: Walk the 10 minutes back at a "hurry-up" pace.
6. *Go!*

The hurry-up pace is when you are late for an appointment and you must get there. It will be one that demands more oxygen for working muscles — and that's how fitness walking gets you big results.

WHAT'S NEXT

Aim for five, 30-minute exercise sessions each week. Increasing your daily step count is an excellent fitness goal. Even if you have been exercising routinely for years, it may not be enough to [combat the ill effects of hours of sitting](#). That's why adding more steps to your day is beneficial for your waistline and your overall health.

A beginner should aim to walk 1 mile in about 18 minutes. You should be able to get to that goal quickly in just a few weeks of consistent walking. Then, extend to 2 miles of walking, no matter how long it takes, and finally get to 2 miles in 30 minutes. That is a strong walking pace that will reward you with good general fitness.

Start off with this [7-Day Walking Plan](#). When you're ready, amp up your walking with this [4-Week Walking Plan](#). Want more results? See [3 Ways to Lose More Weight with Walking](#).

10 WAYS TO ADD MORE STEPS TO YOUR DAY

Beyond fitness walking, or walking for a workout, the number of steps you take per day is a way to monitor your overall movement. You may only walk 2,000–5,000 steps on a fitness walk, but that doesn't mean you should spend the rest of the day sitting. Moving in little bits throughout the day helps negate the ill-effects of too much sitting.

Whether you're working up to 10,000 steps a day or have loftier goals in mind, these 10 easy suggestions can help you gradually [increase your daily step count](#):

1. SET A REMINDER TO WALK

There's no need to try to squeeze in all of your steps in one shot. In fact, you may get more benefit if you spread them out throughout the day. If you often get stuck at your desk for hours on end during your workday, try setting a reminder for every hour, and spend 15 minutes walking. If you're able to repeat this five times a day, you may reach your 10,000 step goal before you leave work!

2. WALK AND TALK

Decide that every time you take a phone call, you'll walk. Whether you are in your office or at home, pace around. If the weather is nice, take your mobile phone with you for an energizing outdoor call. Turning every phone conversation into a walking one can increase your daily step count almost effortlessly.

3. WALK AND LISTEN

Download a podcast or audiobook to listen to while you walk — similar to making phone calls, listening to a good story can make you forget how long you've been walking.

4. SUGGEST A WALKING MEETING

You may not be the only one at work looking to increase their step count. Suggest turning one-on-one or small-group meetings into [walking meetings](#). Movement and fresh air can get ideas flowing, and side-by-side conversations can reveal a fuller range of communication styles — which means more than your step count may benefit.

5. WALK WHEREVER YOU CAN

Whether it's taking the kids to school or getting yourself to work or running errands, if you live close enough to walk there, walk there!

6. PARTNER UP

Sharing steps with someone else is a great way to stay accountable and stick to a goal of walking more — whether it's a post-dinner stroll with your spouse and kids or a power walk with a friend in the morning. Plus, you get to spend quality time with those you love.

7. WALK DURING COMMERCIALS

When there's a commercial break during a program, get up and walk around the room until it's over. You not only gain some steps, you lose some sitting time.

8. WALK WHILE YOU WAIT

Picking up kids? Going to the dentist? Whenever you find yourself waiting, walk around the block or up and down the hall.

9. MAKE THINGS LESS CONVENIENT

Park farther away from the entrance, take the stairs, return shopping carts to the store, skip the drive-through — putting just a little more effort into your routine also ups your daily step tally.

10. COOK AND CLEAN

Cooking dinner, even in a small kitchen, adds a surprising number of steps. Cleaning, yard work and other chores add up, too. Take groceries in one bag at a time. Walk around the ironing board between shirts. There are lots of ways to keep moving and knock things off your to-do list.